



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

News Release

Pacific Islands External Affairs Office

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For Release: June 8, 2005
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PIEA-05-14

Public Comments Sought on Draft Environmental Assessment for Proposed Ecosystem Restoration Project on Lehua Island

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Forestry and Wildlife are seeking public comments on a draft environmental assessment for a proposed ecosystem restoration project on Lehua Island, Kauai County.

The proposed project would restore native seabirds, plants, and other wildlife on Lehua by eradicating nonnative rodents and rabbits that are damaging the island's ecosystem. Once the small mammals are removed, a plant restoration project would follow. The Service and State anticipate that the proposed project would have no significant negative environmental impact, but rather provide a net benefit to native species and their habitats on Lehua.

"Hawaii's offshore islets are some of the few remaining safe havens for our native species, but these jewels of the Pacific are not immune to the negative impacts caused by invasive species in the main Hawaiian Islands," said Chris Swenson, Coastal Program Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Our offshore islets provide us with the best opportunity available to permanently remove invasive species and restore native habitats."

Lehua Island is uninhabited and located less than a mile north of Niihau and approximately 20 miles west of Kauai. The 284-acre State Seabird Sanctuary provides habitat for at least 16 species of seabirds, as well as monk seals, native coastal plants and insects. The U.S. Coast Guard administers the island, and also maintains a navigational light on the island.

Rats are known to have eliminated many seabird species from islands around the world. They also feed on native plants and insects, and can suppress or eliminate many of these species as well. On many islands, rabbits have decimated the vegetation and competed with seabirds for use of ground burrows.

The draft environmental assessment was prepared jointly by the Service and DLNR in accordance with federal and state statutes. Public input was sought prior to the development of the environmental assessment at a public meeting on June 9, 2004, at the Lihue Neighborhood Center, Kauai.

Copies of the Draft EA may be obtained via the Service's website at <http://pacificislands.fws.gov>, or by contacting the Pacific Islands Fish and Wildlife Office at

808 792 9400. A public notice of the comment period will also be published on June 8 in the State of Hawaii Office of Environmental Quality Control bulletin, *The Environmental Notice*.

The Service and DLNR are requesting written comments regarding the proposed action from interested individuals, organizations, and agencies. Written comments should be addressed to Chris Swenson, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 3-122, Honolulu, Hawaii 96850, or faxed to 808 792 9580. All written comments must be postmarked by July 8.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.